

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

5 1. A computer implemented method of on-line merchant authorization comprising:

 providing an authorization database of on-line merchants authorized to sell a particular brand of product offered for sale by a particular manufacturer;

10 providing a communications link for the manufacturer to enter authorization data in the authorization database, said authorization data including information relating to on-line merchants who have been authorized by the manufacturer to sell the manufacturer's particular brand of product on-line;

15 providing a communications link from an on-line search engine to both a customer host and the authorization database; and

 providing a communications link in the search engine to select an option to search the authorization database having
20 only authorized on-line merchants, so that a customer communicating with the search engine via the customer host can select the option to verify whether or not the on-line merchant host is authorized by the manufacturer to sell the particular brand of product on-line.

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 2. A computer implemented method of on-line merchant authorization comprising:

 providing an authorization database of on-line merchants authorized to sell a particular brand of product offered for
30 sale by a particular manufacturer;

 providing a communications link for the manufacturer to enter authorization data in the authorization database, said authorization data including information relating to on-line merchants who are authorized to sell the manufacturers'
35 particular brand of product on-line;

providing a communications link from an on-line merchant
host to both a customer host and the authorization database,
5 the on-line merchant host hosting an on-line merchant's
website; and

 providing authorization information to the merchant's
website via the communications link from the authorization
database to the on-line merchant host to verify for a customer
10 accessing the on-line merchant's website whether or not the
on-line merchant host is authorized by the manufacturer to
sell the particular brand of product on-line.

 3. The method according to claim 2 including:
15 providing an insignia to be visible to the customer on
the on-line merchant's website; and

 granting use of the insignia on the merchant's website
via authentication controlled by a communications link from an
authorization server controlled by the product's manufacturer,

20 in which use of the insignia is granted to verify
authorization to sell the manufacturer's particular product
on-line.

 4. The method according to Claim 3 including
25 controlling the granting of use of the insignia via a system
that protects against copying.

 5. A computer implemented on-line merchant
authorization system comprising:

30 an authorization database of on-line merchants authorized
to sell a particular brand of product offered for sale by a
particular manufacturer;

 a communications link for the manufacturer to enter
authorization data in the authorization database, said
35 authorization data including information relating to on-line

1 **52387/WGM/A792**

merchants who have been authorized by the manufacturer to sell
the manufacturer's particular brand of product on-line;

5 a communications link from an on-line search engine to
both a customer host and the authorization database; and

 a. communications link in the search engine to select an
option to search the authorization database having only
authorized on-line merchants, so that a customer communicating
10 with the search engine via the customer host can select the
option to verify whether or not the on-line merchant host is
authorized by the manufacturer to sell the particular brand of
product on-line.

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